

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15

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R 131200Z DEC 73

FM AMEMOASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8967

INFO AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA UNN

CINCPAC

DIA HQS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19286

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: PROGRESS ON DRAFTING THE CONSTITUTION

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: BANGKOK 18192

SUMMARY: THE CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTING COMMITTEE (CDC) HAS GRAPPLED WITH WRITING THE IMPORTANT SECTIONS DEALING WITH THE SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF PARLIAMENT, THE METHOD OF ELECTORAL DISTRICTING, CANDIDATE AND VOTER QUALIFICATIONS, AND THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES. AS EXPECTED THE KEY ISSUES HAVE SLOWED CDC DELIBERATIONS AND

GENERATED SOME CONTROVERSY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE CDC DECIDED ON AND THEN REJECTED WITHIN A TWO WEEK PERIOD ELABORATE MODIFICATIONS OF THE ALREADY COMPLICATED WEST GERMAN "D'HONDT" SYSTEM FOR ELECTING  
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PARLIAMENT. A SERIES OF SEMINARS AND PANEL DIS-

CUSSIONS AT CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY HAVE DISCLOSED CONSIDERABLE DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE CDC OVER THE MERITS FOR THAILAND OF THE "D'HONDT" SYSTEM. THIS PUBLICITY STIMULATED PUBLIC SKEPTICISM TO

THE POINT THAT EDITORIALS AND THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND CAME OUT AGAINST THE PROPOSAL. (COMMENT: THE OPENNESS OF THE DEBATE AND THE FACT THAT THE CDC COULD REVERSE ITSELF IS TESTIMONY TO THE CHANGES THAT ARE CREEPING INTO THAI POLITICAL LIFE. MORE PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION, AND THE GROUND RULES IT WILL PROVIDE, THAN EVER BEFORE IN THAILAND.)

2. THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTERS HAVE APPARENTLY SETTLED ON A BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE WITH A 300 SEAT ELECTED LOWER HOUSE AND AN APPOINTED UPPER HOUSE, RATHER THAN THE FULLY ELECTED BICAMERAL BODY REPORTED IN REFTEL. THE KING'S PRIVY COUNCIL WILL SUBMIT A LIST OF 300 NAMES TO THE LOWER CHAMBER WHICH WILL CHOOSE THE 100 PERSONS WHO WILL SIT IN THE UPPER HOUSE. AS THINGS STAND NOW, THAILAND'S 72 PROVINCES WILL BE DIVIDED INTO 150 ELECTORAL DISTRICTS REPRESENTING APPROXIMATELY EQUAL NUMBERS OF CONSTITUENTS.

3. THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES. IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THE ROLE AND POSITION OF POLITICAL PARTIES, THE CDC HAS REPORTEDLY AGREED THAT ALL LOWER HOUSE CANDIDATES MUST BELONG TO A POLITICAL PARTY. EACH POLITICAL PARTY WILL HAVE TO FIELD CANDIDATES FOR AT LEAST 75 CONTESTS. THESE PROVISIONS ARE DESIGNED TO INSURE A SMALL NUMBER OF PARTIES WHICH WILL HAVE A REASONABLE DEGREE OF CONTROL OVER THEIR REPRESENTATIVES IN PARLIAMENT. THE CDC HOPES THEREBY TO AVOID THE WEAKNESSES IT PERCEIVES IN PREVIOUS LEGISLATURES WHEREIN THE PARTIES WERE WEAK AND THE PARTIES AND MEMBERS WERE SUBJECT TO MANIPULATION BY THE GOVERNING BUREAUCRATIC ELITE.

4. QUALIFICATIONS FOR CANDIDACY AND VOTERS. IN ORDER TO WIDEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR CANDIDACY, THE CDC HAS REPORTEDLY LOWERED THE EDUCATION LIMIT FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FROM THE EQUIVALENT OF U.S. 10TH GRADE  
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TO 4TH GRADE. CANDIDATES MUST BE AT LEAST 25 YEARS OLD. IN ORDER TO WIN, A CANDIDATE MUST RECEIVE A MAJORITY OF VOTES FROM HIS DISTRICT. LEGISLATIVE TERMS FOR BOTH THE UPPER AND LOWER HOUSES ARE TENTATIVELY EXPECTED TO BE FOUR YEARS.

5. THE CDC HAS ALSO DECIDED THAT THE VOTING AGE SHOULD BE REDUCED FROM 20 TO 18. BECAUSE THE MAJORITY OF THE THAI POPULATION IS UNDER 25, THIS WILL POTENTIALLY GIVE STUDENT

AND OTHER YOUNGELECTORS A LARGE VOICE IN THE  
DEVELOPING POLITICAL SYSTEM.

6. COMMENT: PREVIOUS DEBATES WITHIN THE CDC HAVE RAPIDLY  
REACHED A CONSENSUS. OVER THE LAST TWO WEEKS, HOWEVER, AS  
THE CDC HAS DEALT WITH THE CRUCIAL OPERATIVE ARTICLES  
OF THE CONSTITUTION, AGREEMENT HAS NOT COME SO READILY.  
YET, THE CDC HAS STUCK TO ITS GOAL OF CORRECTING WHAT  
IT PERCEIVES TO BE POLITICAL AND POWER ABUSES THAT  
PLAGUED PREVIOUS ELECTED PARLIAMENTS. THIS INCLUDES  
LOWERING THE VOTING AGE AND EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS  
WITH THE INTENT TO EXPAND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND  
DECREASE THE CHANGE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF FORMER, DIS-  
CREDITED PARLIAMENTARIANS GETTING ELECTED.  
KINTNER

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## Message Attributes

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